

How to Create a Sensory Diet

Universal Sensory Diet - Pro-active schedule of sensory tools, used to **PREVENT** overwhelm and **IMPROVE** coping/flexibility. **SCHEDULE & IMPLEMENT** sensory (bottom-up) strategies into an existing consistent daily schedule (top-down tool). Refer to these handouts on OT Resource page of Learning Services website: [Sensory Snacks & Meals - Handout](#) and School Sensory Strategies Packages: [Part 1](#) & [Part 2](#)

1. Basic understanding of child's developmental level
2. Clear daily schedule with a minimum of 2-3 scheduled "**sensory meal**" blocks/day
3. Decide whether Heavy Work or Deep Pressure is most appropriate

HEAVY WORK (active output)

- Student not touched by adult
- **Physical activity that requires effort**
- Consider: Intensity, duration, frequency (like a gym workout)
- Students must have ability to follow instructions or imitate (model, visuals and/or videos can help)
- Examples: obstacle course, sensory path, classroom tasks, running laps, animal walks

DEEP PRESSURE (passive input)

- **Indirect** (bean bag, howda hug chair, weighted lap pad) OR
- **Direct** pressure applied by adult using a soft object **OR** their hands (hands on "squishes" to hands/feet, arms, shoulders etc.)
- Parent & child's consent **REQUIRED**
- Typically for developmentally low students who still require 100% co-regulation (think infant/toddler)

4. If wanting to explore Direct/hands on Deep Pressure, parent consent required

Parent Consent: Prior to exploring direct deep pressure with a student, support and/or classroom teacher should speak directly with family about what and why (share above handouts with them). Ask them if there are any concerns/reasons why exploring wouldn't be a good idea (trauma informed). Ask them about what works at home. Refer to any reports on file for strategies that have worked in other settings.

6. Develop a "**Buffet**" of successful sensory strategies
7. Decide which successful sensory strategies fit into "**sensory meal**" blocks

How to Build Buffet of Choices– What helps calm and organize this student?

The way we do the same activity can have a different impact on regulation (our own and others). Familiarize yourself with the principles outlined in the following handout to guide you as you explore regulation tools with students. [Key Principles of Up/Down Regulation](#).

EXPLORE:

- ⇒ Reference: School Sensory Strategies Packages – [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) (select 1-5 ideas)
- ⇒ Try them consistently with the student and track their response.
- ⇒ Like a gym workout, play with: INTENSITY, DURATION & FREQUENCY
- ⇒ Involve student (if appropriate): *“Let’s explore ways to help you feel safe, calm and ready to learn. Let’s figure out what works best for you.”*
- ⇒ Keep a list of what you’ve tried, and which ones work best.
- ⇒ Repeat until you have 3-5 successful **“sensory meal”** and **“sensory snack”** ideas
- ⇒ Create a visual or written **“Buffet of Choices”** child/staff can easily refer to during scheduled **“sensory meals”** and **“sensory snacks”** to ensure everyone knows HOW TO provide the right level of INTENSITY, the correct FREQUENCY and DURATION for the child.

PLAN:

- ⇒ Refer to: [Sensory Diet Planning Sheet](#)

IMPLEMENT AND EVALUATE

A sensory diet is PRO-ACTIVE.
The goal is to PREVENT overwhelm/dysregulation.
Avoid waiting until it is “too late”.